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ABSTRACT

The literature shows clearly that rural administrators find it extremely difficult to locate and hire qualified teachers who fit in with the school and community and will stay in the job. The "ideal" rural teacher is certified to teach more than one subject or grade level, can teach students with a wide range of abilities in the same classroom, is prepared to supervise extracurricular activities, and can adjust to the community. One successful recruitment strategy involves stressing the benefits of working in rural and small schools, such as small class size, personal relationships with students, individualized instruction, greater student and parent participation, and greater teacher impact on decision making. Most rural teachers were raised close to where they now teach. Various "grow-your-own" strategies focus on offering incentives to local potential teachers to assist them in obtaining the needed education and training. For example, Future Teachers of America clubs encourage students to consider returning to their home communities once they have received their credentials. Teacher induction in rural and small schools poses particular problems as the new teacher must become acquainted with the community as well as the school. Strategies for successful teacher induction include carefully selected initial assignments, clear goals and feedback, an encouraging and nonthreatening environment, and opportunities to interact with experienced colleagues and parents. Collegial mentoring arrangements, separate from teacher evaluation, can be crucial in helping new teachers through the induction period. Various strategies for retaining qualified rural teachers are listed. (Contains 13 references.) (SV)

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TEACHER INDUCTION IN RURAL AND SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS

The literature shows clearly that administrators in rural or small schools find it extremely difficult to locate and hire qualified teachers who are likely to fit in smoothly to both the school and community and to stay in that job for a long time. The attrition rate in rural and small schools is extremely high; Helge and Marrs (1981, p. 12) reported a turnover rate of 30-50% in rural areas, culminating in a complete turnover every three years. The major problems for new teachers in rural districts, according to district administrators, include the adjustment to geographic isolation, population sparsity, and difficulty with "community fit" into the lifestyle and expectations of the community (Horn, 1985, p. 13). Many districts report difficulty in locating qualified applicants for positions that are vacant for long periods of time (Helge and Marrs, 1981, p. 2). Hare sums up the problems of rural and small schools trying to compete against urban or suburban systems: rural and small schools can offer "...neither the higher salaries of larger systems, faster pace of urban-suburban living, or staffed personnel departments with recruiting budgets" (Hare, 1988, p. 2).

RECRUITMENT

The problems arise in finding qualified teachers for these positions. The characteristics described "ideal" for a teacher in a rural school include being certified to teach more than one subject area or grade level in the same classroom during the same time span, being able to teach students with a wide range of abilities in a single classroom, and being able to overcome the students' cultural differences and add to their understanding of the larger society. Other desirable characteristics include being prepared to supervise several extra-curricular activities and the ability to adjust to the uniqueness of the community in terms of social opportunities, lifestyles, and loss of privacy (Campbell, 1985, p. 7 and Horn, 1985, p. 14). Sher reports that "...the best rural teachers are the ones who are able to cope with sparsity, utilize community resources, invent curricular materials, and above all else, are oriented toward teaching children rather than subjects" (Sher, 1977, p. 287).

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One recruitment strategy that districts report as successful is to stress the benefits of working in rural and small schools. In a study reported by Nachtigal, teachers in rural schools responded more positively about their level of general job satisfaction than teachers in urban schools (Nachtigal, 1992, p. 76). Teachers in rural and small schools often report there are many positive features to working in small schools and communities, including small class size, increased opportunity for individualized instruction and the chance to know each child as an individual, fewer behavioral problems, less bureaucracy, greater student and parent participation in schools and school activities, greater heterogeneity of the social class, and a sense of greater teacher impact on the curriculum (Miller and Sidebottom, 1985, p. 3 and Swift, 1984, p. 1). Teachers in these schools often have more opportunities to participate in the decision-making aspects of school site management than their peers in larger districts or those with greater centralization of administrative functions (Muse and Thomas, 1992, p. 56). In fact, rural and small schools already include many of the characteristics identified in the "effective schools" research including "...interpersonal relationships, shared expectations, and a safe learning environment..." (Nachtigal, 1992, p. 76). Another possible benefit of working in a closely-knit community is that the teacher can utilize community members to help make learning activities more "real" by engaging students in studying their community. For example, one excellent program is the Foxfire curriculum designed by Eliot Wigginton in which students in high school English classes publish a magazine based on the history and culture of the community in which the school is located. (Note: for more information, please refer to *Once A Shining Moment*, by Eliot Wigginton.)

Where can you find qualified teachers? Schmuck and Schmuck interviewed 119 teachers in 80 rural schools and found that over 90% had been raised in communities very close to where they were now teaching (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1989). Muse and Thomas suggest that "knowing that teachers with rural ties are more likely to come to rural communities and stay, rural districts should concentrate on attracting teachers with rural backgrounds..." (Muse and Thomas, 1992, p. 59). The term "growing your own" is sometimes used in relation to recruiting teachers and means that districts should look within their classified employee and volunteer groups for potential teachers. Districts should try to offer incentives to these classified, volunteer, and graduate groups to assist them in obtaining the needed education; this will not only aid these people to become teachers but will also build a stronger allegiance to your district. Successful programs are in place at the University of Portland, the University of Utah,

Utah State University and many other institutions. In Utah State's pilot program, the participants were classified employees (instructional assistants) who continued to work during the week and attended class on Saturdays. The university delivered classes on-site so participants would not have to spend time traveling to the campus. The program was carefully evaluated and found to be highly successful: over 50% of the participants were still teaching in the district and others had relocated but were still teaching. The university recommended that in future programs based on this model, the districts and institution enter into a written agreement specifying the number of participants, who is responsible for the selection process, who will pay for materials, building costs, etc. so as to avoid difficulties after the program is begun (Willis and Henderson, 1989, p. 2).

Other effective "grow your own" strategies are to sponsor Future Teachers of America clubs and to implement a career education program within the district to encourage students to consider teaching as a career and to think seriously about returning to their home communities once they have received their credentials.

INDUCTION

In an effective system, the process of induction should begin the moment the new teacher is hired. Induction is the term used to describe all the processes through which a new teacher is introduced to the policies and culture of the school district, including the individual school, the staff, curriculum, and the community. A review of the literature shows induction in rural and small schools poses particular problems. "...Induction in rural and small school systems is not only to the system and school, but also to the rural area itself; not only to the school, but to each course...and to the students, etc." (Hare, 1989, pp. 9-11). "...Getting acquainted may also mean the beginning of life in a fishbowl as small town citizens often pay closer attention to the conduct of each other -- especially persons such as teachers -- than in large urban areas where anonymity is practically guaranteed" (Muse and Thomas, 1992, p. 57).

How can a district design appropriate induction processes? The literature describes the methods most commonly used. "...Making the new teacher feel a part of the educational team and part of the community is crucial to that teacher's success" (Muse and Thomas, 1992, p. 59). Administrators report they assist beginning teachers in rural schools by offering a pre-school year orientation program, by pairing the new teacher with a master teacher, by assigning the new teacher an out of class project that requires

interaction with other school personnel, and by making regular visits to the beginning teacher's classroom (Miller and Sidebottom, 1985, p. 26). Researchers also recommend that these problems may be eased by increasing inservice practices, initially reducing teaching and other instructional responsibilities and increasing time for planning and organizing instruction, providing opportunities to observe the teaching of more experienced colleagues, and offering opportunities for beginning teachers to interact with one another (Swift, 1984, p. 2). Rosenholtz summarizes the literature with these ten components essential for successful induction of new teachers:

1) Carefully selected initial assignments which avoid placing the new teacher in the most difficult schools nor with the most difficult situations,
2) Opportunities to participate in decision-making coupled with autonomy in many classroom choices,
3) Clearly set administrative goals,
4) Regular, clear feedback and specific suggestions for improvement,
5) Encouragement from administrators and colleagues,
6) A non-threatening environment which encourages questions,
7) Opportunities for discussion with experienced colleagues,
8) Encouragement to experiment and discuss the results with colleagues,
9) Clearly set school rules for student behavior,
10) Opportunities to interact with parents

(Rosenholtz, 1989, pp. 436-437).

Most educators would agree that mentoring programs are effective in helping new teachers through the induction period. Mentoring programs vary significantly, but Bey suggested a common definition, "Mentoring is an old practice of experienced teachers passing on their expertise and wisdom to new colleagues faced with the challenges associated with the initial phase of teaching" (Bey, 1990). "Collegial mentoring arrangements -- even if by telephone when distances are great -- can mean the difference between feelings of acceptance and isolation for new teachers" (Muse and Thomas, 1992, p. 59).

While no commonly accepted formal operational definition of mentoring exists, educators do agree on one main element: mentoring programs must exist separately from evaluative programs.

RETENTION

Small and rural school districts also report difficulty in retaining qualified teachers. Included in the literature are suggestions for several long term strategies including reimbursement of dues for professional association memberships, opportunities for sabbatical and faculty exchange programs, reimbursement of tuition, and provision of release time for travel to professional meetings. Suggestions for inservice and staff development activities in small or rural schools include the use of alternative instructional formats such as cable and 2-way television systems and correspondence courses and the development of regional inservice education centers. Another suggestion is to give salary increments for teaching assignments which require multiple subject areas or grade level responsibilities (Swift, 1984, p. 2).

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